

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 INR-07 L-03 ACDA-07
NSAE-00 PA-01 SS-15 PRS-01 SP-02 USIA-06 TRSE-00
MC-02 IGA-02 NSC-05 /068 W
-----131805Z 080236 /43

R 121857Z MAY 77
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NATO 03187

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, MPOL, NATO, PO
SUBJECT: TANKS FOR PORTUGAL

REF: USCINCEUR ECCC 07877 (DTG 101948Z MAY 77)

1. FRG DEFAD, BGEN SCHUENEMANN, HAS INFORMED US THAT PORTUGUESE PRESIDENT EANES AND FRG MINISTER OF DEFENSE LEBER RECENTLY EXCHANGED LETTERS ON THE GENERAL SUBJECT OF M-48 TANKS PROVIDED BY THE FRG FOR MODERNIZATION OF A PORTUGUESE ARMY BRIGADE.

2. PRESIDENT EANES, ACCORDING TO SCHUENEMANN, EXPRESSED HIS PLEASURE AT THE GERMAN WILLINGNESS TO PROVIDE THE TANKS. HE ALSO EXPLAINED THAT THE PORTUGUESE HOPED THE M48A2 TANKS COULD BE UPGRADED TO M48A5 (A) SO THAT THE
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PORTUGUESE BRIGADE, WHICH ALREADY HAS FIVE M48A5 TANKS, COULD MAINTAIN AND TRAIN WITH A SINGLE MODEL AND (B) IN ORDER TO CAPITALIZE ON TRAINING (ESPECIALLY MAINTENANCE TRAINING) ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED.

3. MINISTER LEBER, IN REPLYING, POINTED OUT THAT MANY OF THE M48A2 TANKS NOW IN THE FRG INVENTORY WOULD BE

RETAINED IN THE TERRITORIAL FORCES FOR MANY YEARS TO COME, ALTHOUGH THEY WOULD BE UPGRADED TO 105 MM GUNS AND PROVIDED IMPROVED FIRE CONTROL EQUIPMENT. ACCORDING TO SCHUENEMANN, LEBER DID NOT TELL THE PORTUGUESE THEY WOULD HAVE TO ACCEPT EXPENDING MORE THAN HALF OF THE FUNDS WHICH THE FRG INTENDS TO MAKE AVAILABLE FOR EQUIPMENT ASSISTANCE (REPORTEDLY DM 25 MILLION) ON THIS ONE HIGH-PRIORITY UNDERTAKING, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT FORECLOSE THE POSSIBILITY THAT FORTHCOMING FRG-PORTUGUESE TALKS WILL POSE SUCH A CHOICE TO THE PORTUGUESE.

4. STATE SECRETARY FINGERHUT, WHOSE RESPONSIBILITIES, WE UNDERSTAND, ARE PRIMARILY ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL, IS AT PRESENT VISITING PORTUGAL, AND WILL UNDOUBTEDLY DISCUSS THIS ISSUE.

5. SCHUENEMANN ALSO INFORMED US THAT THE FRG IS ASKING GERMAN INDUSTRY FOR QUOTATIONS ON UPGRADING M48A2S TO M48A5. THEY ARE DOING SO, HE SAID, PURELY TO ESTABLISH THAT HAVING THIS WORK DONE IN THE US WOULD BE CHEAPER, IN THE EVENT THAT A DECISION TO UPGRADE M48A5 EVENTUALLY IS TAKEN. IN THIS REGARD, SCHUENEMANN ALSO INFORMED US THAT BONN HAS NOT RECEIVED ANY FIRM AND OFFICIAL INFORMATION, REPORTEDLY REQUESTED IN MID-MARCH, ON COST OF UPGRADING KITS. HIS AUTHORITIES NEED THIS INFORMATION, SCHUENEMANN SAID, IN ORDER TO COMPLETE THEIR DETERMINATION OF RELATIVE COSTS BETWEEN US AND FRG PERFORMANCE OF UPGRADE WORK. CONSEQUENTLY, THE FRG IS UNLIKELY TO MAKE ANY DECISIONS PENDING RECEIPT OF THIS INFORMATION.
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6. COMMENT: THIS SITUATION, IF TRUE, COULD CONTRIBUTE TO PORTUGUESE FRUSTRATIONS, AND COULD PERMIT THE FRG -- WHICH IS WILLING BUT NOT EAGER TO FINANCE UPGRADING -- TO PORTRAY THE US AS RESPONSIBLE FOR INACTION. WE URGE THAT THE US PROVIDE COST INFORMATION TO THE FRG AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, AND WE SUPPORT FULLY USNMR SHAPE'S RECOMMENDATION (REFTEL) THAT AMEMBASSY BONN UNDERTAKE DISCUSSIONS WITH FRG TO OBTAIN FRG COMMITMENT TO ACCOMPLISHMENT OF TANK UPGRADING THROUGH USE OF US CONVERSION FACILITIES, WITH DELIVER OF 18 M48A5 TANKS TO PORTUGAL BY DECEMBER, 1977. END COMMENT. BENNETT

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 12-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977NATO03187
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: RR
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: n/a
Format: TEL
From: NATO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770564/aaaaccrx.tel
Line Count: 109
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Message ID: 27893895-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: USCINCEUR ECCC 07877 (DTG 101948Z MA
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05-Oct-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2544068
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TANKS FOR PORTUGAL
TAGS: MASS, MPOL, PO, NATO
To: SECSTATE WASHDC WASHDC MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/27893895-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009